

THE GENERAL STATE OF RESEARCH
INTO THE HISTORY OF GHANA

by R.H.K. Darkwah*

Between the several Institutes and Departments of the University of Ghana - in particular the Departments of History and Archaeology and the Institute of African Studies - considerable historical research has been undertaken in recent years. For obvious reasons, the history of the peoples within the boundaries of the modern state of Ghana has been the main, though by no means the exclusive, concern of research workers. Total exclusiveness would in fact be unrealistic for there are at the University at Legon, in both the Institute and the Departments, academics engaged in research into the history not only of West Africa but also Eastern and Central Africa not to mention other areas of the 'third world' such as India.

Planned archaeological research is one of the few means to supplement and to some extent validate conclusions arrived at by the student of manuscripts and oral traditions, and with linguistic study it is the only major source of information about the events predating those to which the manuscripts and traditions refer.

In recent years great expansion has taken place in the amount of archaeological work undertaken in Ghana, partly owing to the emergency measures made necessary by the flooding of large areas by the Volta Hydro-electric Project but partly, also, due to the expansion of the Department of Archaeology at Legon correlation of historical and archaeological conclusions has to some extent suffered, since by its very nature, archaeological rescue-work has necessitated the completion of a great deal of fieldwork. Very little of this has yet been published in its final form but with the launching of the West African Archaeological Journal and a Monograph Series by the Department of Archaeology, a

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medium now exists for the publication of up-to-date results of archaeological research.

However, it is at this stage possible to summarise what has been done since 1963, and to point out areas in which profitable results might locally be expected from further excavation. In the coastal regions, detailed work on the chronology of tobacco-pipes has provided a basis for dating sites of the seventeenth century and later. Excavations at a presumed Dutch site at Bantama (near Elmina) have begun the important process of linking the documented material evidence of the European settlements with the undocumented contemporary indigenous cultures - and those at Ahinsan and Twifu Hemang have provided information on some aspects of the material culture of the forest states of the sixteenth century and later.

On the northern fringe of the forest, detailed excavations in the Kintampo area have added greatly to our knowledge of the cultures immediately preceding the discovery of iron, supported by evidence from sites to the north such as Ntereso and Chukoto. In the Keta Krachi area, a series of 12 minor excavations conducted under the Volta Basin Research Project has produced a mass of material evidence mostly relating to the events of the sixteenth century and later, but important information about the early stone age has also come from the terraces of the Oti Valley. The important site of Kitare in this area relates both to the question of the north-east trade routes and to the expansion of Gonja in the east.

In the west the excavation of the eighteenth-century village of But provides a basis for typology in the later history of the area of Banda; further research is urgently needed to check on the numerous historical speculations about this area in the centre of which is the important site of Bagho.

In Gonja, a series of nine excavations at mound-sites has enabled the archaeologists to form a comparatively accurate picture of some of the cultures comprised within the Gonja State since the sixteenth century and in some cases of the cultures in the area preceding its formation.

This area is at present by far the best provided for in archaeological terms, to such an extent that detailed correlation between the important findings of Goody, Wilks and Levtzion in the field of manuscript and oral tradition on the one hand and excavated evidence on the other is already possible in some cases. It is here that further excavation would show the most immediately profitable results for a combined research programme; but it is in the forest areas that this kind of research is most urgently needed, whilst detailed work at such sites as Begho and Bono-Manso would elucidate many of the problems of the trade from the Niger city states.

A development of note for the future of archaeological research in West Africa is the introduction of a full teaching programme in archaeology at the University of Ghana at both the B.A. and M.A. level and it is hoped that students will in the future be able to participate more fully in practical field research. To this end, periodical training schools in archaeology have been instituted and the University of Ghana is willing to offer its teaching resources in archeology to train archaeologists from neighbouring West African states.

French policy in West Africa in the nineteenth century, with particular reference to Senegal, is one field in which research is currently being conducted by a member of the History Department at Legon. This work has been going for about four years now and the analysis of the material collected is in an advanced stage. Among the problems under investigation are the economic and political relationship between the 'Moors' of the northern bank of the Senegal river and those of the Southern bank in the period before the arrival of the French; the effect of French policy on this relationship and the reaction of the Moors, especially those of the northern bank, to the policies pursued by the French. It is hoped that the results of this study will be generally available to academics in the very near future.

Other members of the History Department are extending research to Togo and Dahomey, investigating the connections between the Ga-Adangbe-Ewe-Mina and Fon groups.

Another interesting research topic which falls within the wider scope of West African history and which is now being pursued at the Institute of African Studies, is Islamic state formation in West Africa in the 18th and 19th century. Futa Toro, Futa Jallon, Massina, Sokoto, the Umarian States, Samory Turay's State and several smaller ones are treated as case studies. The administration of Samory Turay in particular is being studied for a doctoral dissertation. The approach which has been adopted has a strong bias towards the biographical and the questions which are being investigated include the following: who actually were the men who linked their careers to that of Samory? Where were they from? What was their social background? What happened to them when Samory was exiled in 1898? The rise of the Islamic states in the 18th and 19th century constitutes an important period in the history of West Africa and this study should contribute appreciably to our understanding of that period. Already what little analysis that has been made of the material collected indicates, for example, that what existing generalisations there are about the Samorian administration are hopelessly inadequate. Documentary material for this study has been collected from archives in London, Paris, Dakar, Accra and other places; local Arabic documents as well as oral evidence are being made use of and field work has been done in Mauretania, Senegal, northern Sierra Leone, Ivory Coast, Upper Volta, Niger, Togo and northern Ghana.

We may now turn to consider what is being done on the history of the peoples who live within the political frontiers of the modern state of Ghana. Research within the last few years has established the outlines of the history of Ghana from at least the beginning of the 16th century. The 17th and 18th centuries are well covered especially as regards the empires of Akwamu and Asante. The Empire of Denkyira, on whose ruins Asante developed, has for some curious reason not had the detailed treatment it deserves. Nor has anything been done on such states as Wassa, Twifu, Aowin and Sefwi, which were closely associated with both Denkyira and Asante in the 17th and 18th centuries. Here indeed is a fertile field for fresh inquiry.

The predominant position acquired by Asante among the states on the Gold Coast (now Ghana) in the 18th and 19th centuries has naturally led research to concentration on that Empire. As a result, Asante is without doubt the best studied of all the traditional states which now constitute the modern nation of Ghana. In 1963, the Asante Research Project was launched by the Institute of African Studies, and it has received some financial support from UNESCO. Its aim is to study the society and culture in that area which historically fell within the Asante sphere of influence. As thus defined, the project covers practically all the traditional areas in modern Ghana. So far, however, it is only the heartland of the Empire, the Asante area itself, which has been given anything like serious attention. Even here the studies that have been undertaken are yet far from exhaustive. It has been demonstrated, however, that Asante had a duality of history - that which had to do with the south and that which derived from the north. It is the southern factor which has been best studied. Practically all that is known of Asante - its government and administration, its commerce and foreign relations - is based almost entirely on studies of Asante's relations with her southern neighbours. The importance of the northern factor was first brought to attention in 1961, but that field has not been completely explored and a comprehensive study of the northern factor has therefore yet to appear.

It is thus pleasing to know that at present there is research in progress in the History Department at Legon which should contribute to the remedying of this imbalance. Its general perspective is the Asante Empire and her northern neighbours, in particular, Gonja, Dagomba, Gyaman and Kong. Its aim is to examine the political and economic relationships between the Asante Empire and her neighbours to the north and to examine her fate in that area at the close of the 19th century. The issues under consideration include an examination of the economic importance of the northern trade routes and the extent of Asante control over them; an examination of the impact of the Asante bureaucracy on the north; and a re-examination of the theory which has recently been put forward of the non-development of entrepreneurship in Asante with special reference to northern trade. Hitherto the last quarter of the 19th

century was regarded as a blank period in Asante history, a period which saw the destruction of all that Asante had created in the preceding centuries. The analysis which has been made of the material collected so far for this new study indicates that in the fields of economics, governmental techniques and foreign relations the north seems rather to provide evidence of the continuity of Asante policy in this period.

Considerable work has recently been done at the Institute of African Studies on the assimilated areas to the north of Asante. As part of the Asante Research Project, a good deal of material has been collected on the political and economic relationships between Kumasi, the centre of the Asante Empire, and the assimilated areas to the north-west of Kumasi - namely Kintampo, Nkoranza, Techiman and Wenchi. Similar work has been done on the areas to the north-east of Kumasi - Ejura, Atebubu, Yeji, Prang and Krachi. These preliminary studies should provide a basis for a comprehensive study of the northern factor in the history of Asante.

Mention of the northern factor must refer directly to the role played by Muslims in the political, commercial and religious history of the Western Sudan. This leads us to another of the aspects of the work being done at the Institute of African Studies at Legon. This is the collection of Arabic manuscripts as historical source materials. These manuscripts have been collected not only from Northern Ghana but from Ivory Coast, Upper Volta, Northern Togoland and other parts of West Africa. The policy which has been adopted has been to borrow documents, copy them by (xerox or photostat) and return the original together with a number of copies to the owner. This has resulted in the acquisition of works, predominantly of a religious nature. Henceforth priority is to be given to works of an historical nature. Very friendly relations have been established between the Institute and various individual Islamic scholars as well as centres of Islamic education in many parts of West Africa and as a result of this interplay, for example, some local Muslim historians have co-operated in revising their works, placing more emphasis on the sources of their information, re-examining some of their dates etc. One man who has done much to foster this relationship has been our excellent and indefatigable collector, Al-Hajj 'Uthman Ishaqa Boyo, whose connection with the Institute has been a great asset with regard to the Institute's Arabic manuscript collection. The Institute now has no less

than 475 Arabic manuscripts in its Library. This material has been catalogued and classified and is available on card file. Check lists are published in the issues of the Institute's Research Review. This publication appears three times a year and aims at making available to scholars information on research at the Institute in all fields of African Studies. The entire check list of the Institute's collection of Arabic manuscripts, in its fullest form, together with an introduction and indexes of subjects, authors, provenance etc. is now in an advanced stage of preparation.

Another area in which the Institute's Asante Research Project is making progress is the study of the provinces or states which constituted the nucleus of the Asante Empire - Kumasi, Dwaben, Mampon, Nsuta, Bekwai, Kokofu. Local histories of these traditional stools are being collected and these provide material for the political, economic and military history of the various divisions. When this material comes to be analysed the sum total should provide a detailed and balanced picture of Asante at the divisional, district and even the village level. Work in the Department of History on the divisional state of Dwaben has reached an advanced stage.

The collection of the stool histories and the Court records of traditional Asante, it should be emphasised, is only part of the historical research being done at the Institute of African Studies at Legon. As has been mentioned already, the Asante Research Project envisages collection of local histories of all the other traditional areas of Ghana, and already work in this direction is under way in Akuapem, Kwahu, Adanse, Assin, Aowin, Twifo, Akyem Abuakwa, Anlo and the Fante states. The History Department is co-operating with the Institute in this work. It is hoped that other areas will be covered in the near future. And when the material collected for all these areas is analysed it should provide a quite comprehensive picture of the states of Ghana up to the beginning of the colonial period.

Although the northern and upper regions of Ghana, the area north of the confluence of the Black and White Voltas, are within the orbit of the

Asante Research Project, very little work has so far been attempted on that area. Only very recently, however, the Department of History in collaboration with the Institute of African Studies has drawn up a Northern History Research Scheme with a view of focussing attention on that area - more especially, on the kingdoms of Mamprusi, Dagomba and Gonja. (Attached as Appendix 'D' is a copy of this Scheme). A pilot scheme covering the kingdom of Mamprusi under the direction of the Department of History, financed jointly by the Institute of African Studies and the Department of History is already in progress. But funds locally available are exceedingly limited and the Northern Research Scheme will have to be financed in part from external sources - any help that UNESCO, for example, can offer in this respect will be graciously received.

The colonial era in Ghana has also received less attention than it deserves and much is still to be known despite the fact that many of the events of the period are within the living memory of most of us. And the little that has been done on the period has been the work of political scientists. At the moment, however, there are certain projects dealing with this period under way in the History Department. One of them deals with the role played by the Christian Missions in the development of colonial policy and administration of the country. Undoubtedly such projects will make more than incidental reference to the response of Africans to the colonial experience. What one would like to see, however, is a detailed and comprehensive work on the reaction of the Ghanaians to the changes brought about in their traditional ways of life as a result of the introduction of Christianity and colonial administration into their country.

In this connection mention may be made of two pieces of research which are nearing completion in the University College of Cape Coast. One of these examines African protest movements and their effects on the Gold Coast. It provides evidence from, among others, Asante and Anlo areas to demonstrate the impracticability, long recognised, of the stated British policy of non-involvement in local affairs. It is argued in this work that in the Anlo area, for example, disputes over trade led to a series

of crises which in turn forced the British to annex Anlo. The other research work examines the origins and development of the movement which seems to have reached its climax in the 1950s in both Togo and Ghana, for the unification of the Ewe people. As is well known, the Ewe were divided between British, German and French colonies. One of the questions which this study examines is what unity there had been among the Ewe peoples in the pre-colonial period, which might serve as a basis for re-unification.

These two studies, of course, are merely a beginning in the vast amount of research that needs to be made into the history of Ghana in the colonial period. It is hoped that future research workers will find this review useful as a guide to what remains to be done.

What plans are there for future research? Work on the Asante Research Project continues as does the collection of Arabic manuscripts and court records. Secondly, the pilot scheme on Mamprusi will receive more attention in the Department of History in the next academic year. Subject to the availability of funds, the entire Northern Research Scheme will be implemented in the next academic year or two. Since this particular scheme falls more neatly into programme of work affecting the Niger Valley, it is fervently hoped that it will receive wider support.

Thirdly, in the near future, it is intended that more effort should be directed to the South-western states of Ghana, namely, Wassa, Aowin and Sefwi. These are states on which hardly any work has been done - even the oral traditions of these states have yet to be collected.



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